DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 324 CG 010 098

AUTHOR Herzog, Elizabeth; And Others
TITLE Teenagers Discuss the "Generation Gap." Youth Reports No. 1.
INSTITUTION Children's Bureau (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 70
NOTE 43p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS College Bound Students; *Communication Problems; *Generation Gap; High School Students; *Parent Child Relationship; *Social Values; *Student Opinion; Surveys

ABSTRACT

This report details the results of a study undertaken to poll high school student opinion on the "Generation Gap." A panel was randomly selected from students in college preparatory courses, in metropolitan areas located in the four main geographical regions of the United States. Replies to the questions were received from 251 students, in 53 schools, in 12 cities. Two open-ended questions asked the students to report the views that prevail among their friends and classmates as to (1) the main things adults do or say or fail to understand, that bother teenagers, and (2) the main things young people do or don't do that make things worse. The results of the study are reported as patterning of opinions rather than as exact count. The opinion patterns are complemented by numerous examples of student response. (Author/SJL)

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youth reports no. 1

TEENAGERS DISCUSS THE "GENERATION GAP"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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OFFICE of CHILD DEVELOPMENT
children's bureau

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This report is the first in a continuing study of youth opinions, conducted by the Children's Bureau as part of the Office of Child Development. The series will be maintained as part of the Children's Bureau's ongoing responsibility to investigate and report on matters which affect the welfare of children and youth.

The method used in the study is somewhat unconventional. On the one hand, it does not seek the arithmetical precision claimed by the usual polls and surveys. On the other hand, it is designed to elicit more information than they typically obtain about the meaning of a "yes" or "no" answer, and what is indicated by "don't know," "maybe," and "it depends." This method has proved highly useful with adult correspondents, and judging from responses to the first round of questions it has much to offer when employed with a panel of teenagers.

The opinions studied represent those of a limited but important segment of youth: urban and suburban high school students enrolled in college preparatory courses. These are college students of tomorrow, who will influence the climate and tone of tomorrow's campuses.

Jule M Sugarman

JULE M. SUGARMAN
Acting Director
OFFICE of CHILD DEVELOPMENT

CHARLES P. GERSHENSON
Acting Director, Division of Research

CG

youth
reports no.1

TEENAGERS DISCUSS THE "GENERATION GAP"

ELIZABETH HERZOG

CECELIA E. SUDIA

BARBARA ROSENGARD

JANE HARWOOD

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
OFFICE of CHILD DEVELOPMENT
children's bureau

1970

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METHOD OF STUDY

The panel was randomly selected from high school students in college preparatory courses, in metropolitan areas located in the four main regions of the United States, as defined by the Bureau of the Census (North, South, Midwest, West). Questions were sent to 407 students and replies were received from 251, in 53 schools, in 12 cities. (See Appendix B. for a more detailed note on response.)

This type of study differs from the usual poll or survey in that:

A. The free and discursive answers to open-end questions furnish opinion clues beyond the scope of the usual poll.

B. Since correspondents are asked to report the views that prevail among their friends and classmates, rather than merely their own opinions, they are regarded as providing opinion "coverage" rather than as a statistical sample.

C. Results are given in words rather than in numbers. Numerical proportions, where indicated, are validly derived from the data--all answers are strictly coded and tabulated. However, they are presented as approximations rather than as precise percentages, and the analysis is qualitative as well as quantitative. The purpose is to present the main patterning of opinions rather than an exact count.

D. Where mention of a point is volunteered rather than directly elicited, relatively small proportions may be significant and salience must be judged in comparison with other points volunteered.

Excerpts from the responses are quoted to illustrate or elaborate opinions summarized in the text, and do not necessarily reflect frequency of occurence. Experience with analogous studies, and comparison with relevant polls or surveys, give grounds for considerable confidence that the opinion profile obtained with this method validly reflects the views of the groups represented--in this case, high school students enrolled in college preparatory courses in metropolitan areas.

QUESTIONS SENT TO "YOUTH REPORTERS"

This report is based on mail responses from a panel of high school students to the following questions:

> We hear a lot these days about the "Generation Gap." We'd like to know what your friends think about it, and whether they think about it at all. If so, what are the main things that adults do or say or fail to understand that bother teenagers so much?

> What about the other side of the coin? Do your friends think that some of the problems come from the teenagers? If so, what are the main things young people do or don't do that make things worse?

TEENAGERS DISCUSS THE "GENERATION GAP"

"In my group of friends, the 'Generation Gap' is the main topic of conversation, we just don't refer to it by that name, but it all boils down to the same thing."

"The Generation Gap--that most talked about and least understood topic of discussion today--has never really been defined. This is probably because it covers such a wide range of things that the definition would have to be all-inclusive. It might be better defined as the Age Gap or the Understanding Gap. To teenagers the problem is, 'I just can't talk to my parents--they don't even try to understand.' And to Mom and Dad it's 'Billy just doesn't make sense. Some of the ideas he has are so radical!'"

"Older generation has probably given up on these problems, and we look at them and wonder how they can sit and stare. We probably can't solve them either, but a try is worth it. We did not see our parents try."

Youth speaks with many voices

Teenagers are no more unanimous than their elders on most subjects. In answering questions about the generation gap, for every complaint or accusation lodged against parents and adults generally, there are some who say the opposite, or say that the charge holds for some but not all, or that it is as true of teenagers as of adults. Often a single response to our questions will include a range of opinions, with an effort to indicate relative proportions, to say which kinds of teenagers are likely to hold the various views expressed, or to explain that the writer and his friends do not share this viewpoint. Nevertheless, the main lines of prevalent opinions are clear, and it is possible to differentiate between broad consensus, evenly divided opinions, and views voiced only--though often strongly--by a few. The present report attempts to outline these main configurations, always with the understanding--explicit or implicit--that every point has its "counter-point."

Existence and Nature of the Generation Gap

Is there a problem "gap"?

A wide range of opinions emerges about the existence and nature of a generation gap. About half of our correspondents report that it is viewed as a real problem, and a few add that it is worse than in former years. The other half divide rather evenly, one group (about a quarter of all the correspondents) saying it is not viewed as a problem at all, while the others say it is seen as a problem for some but not for others.

This last group makes some careful distinctions about those who do or do not see a "problem gap." In some instances the correspondent reports that it is not a problem for "me personally," or for "me and my friends," but that many peers experience problems. Occasionally the latter are characterized as those who have less warm and close relations with parents, who do not appreciate what they receive, who are hostile or "brought up wrong," whose parents are "too old." One or two comment that problems are less severe with adults other than parents, because the other adults "don't expect to control." On the other hand, a few correspondents comment that problems are more likely to exist for college students than for those who are still in high school.

> "We don't talk about the generation gap, as such, because we all recognize it and accept it. Thus, it isn't a topic, but an assumption behind conversation. For example, the remark, 'I had a pretty good talk with my Dad last night,' is taken to mean that there has been a rare occurrence."

> "It's almost like kids look up to another one their age who can put something over on his parents."

> "In the special case of Blacks which I am more familiar with--this gap is even wider and the problems more difficult. The younger generation has become 'aware' and is now attempting to make older Blacks and all America just as 'aware.' The task is harder because young aware Black students are trying to change the entire attitude of Blacks towards themselves, and America's attitude toward Blacks as a race."

"I don't think any of my friends really think about it, as such. It is just commonly accepted that everyone hates her parents."

"No problem"

The substantial minority (about one-fourth) who dismiss the generation gap as a problem do so on various grounds. Over half of them concede the presence of a gap between youth and adults, but report the opinion that it is normal and to be expected, there always was a gap and always will be one, and it is no worse now than before.[1] Almost as many say it is seen as a problem only or mainly because it is "blown up by the media"--a point likely to be made with some bitterness. (The role of the media is also criticized by some who affirm the presence of a problem gap.)

"Sure maybe there is a generation gap, but I'm sure we're not the first generation that's gapped."

"From the way my grandparents talk, I'm pretty sure that my parents weren't understood either. Of course, I probably won't understand my kids either."

"I am sure that each parent generation had, has, and will have objections to its younger generation."

"I do not see there being a generation gap. It is natural for people of the same age group to think, act and feel similarly."

Others are more emphatic in downgrading the importance of what one or two derisively refer to as "the G.G.". Some of them add that other things are much more important--for instance, education, racism, poverty; that it's a matter of individuals, not of generations--what we have, they say, is a "people gap" or a "love gap." And a few see it as an excuse made up by adults (chiefly parents) as "a blind," a way to avoid the "real" problems.

"The 'Generation Gap' is a cliché, comparable to 'relative' and other 'groovy' words of our time...Journalists, television personalities, authors, and radio announcers all take advantage of an 'in' word to help them 'relate' to their audience."

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1 See Appendix A for numbered notes.

"The generation gap is, according to many kids--who have good relationships with their parents--an overemphasized, over generalized, over coined phrase, used to describe a rebelliousness occurring during the adolescent years accompanied by friction in the home."

"The gap between aware Blacks and unaware Blacks is not necessarily one of age. In most cases it involves the extent to which one has been brainwashed by white America... Even though this brainwashing is more extent in older people, some people as young as junior high school age have proven to be more stubborn to the 'de-brainwashing' process than some grandparents."

A very few have a good word to say for the generation gap. Without it, they hold, there would be no progress. It forces teenagers to think for themselves, reach their own conclusions "so we will be a very determined people." One correspondent deplores the lack of a generation gap in his community.

"But, it should be remembered that without conflicting views, how could there be progress?"

"I think it would be rather odd if 2 different generations had the same ideals and morals. If this happened there would never be any progress."

"Also, high-school or other teachers intensify and broaden the generation gap by encouraging teenagers to (keep up) this gap because it is a sign of improvement and there always must exist a gap."

"If a generation gap doesn't develop here, my State is going to stay in the past and continue to fall behind the rest of the country."

The nature of the gap

The nature and causes of the generation gap are discussed by many of those who see it as a problem, and also by some who belittle its importance or who say that it does exist but is no problem for them personally. By far the majority of those who comment see it as a gap in understanding or communication, some saying that it is in fact a "communication gap" or an "understanding gap." The most common complaint is that "they don't understand" or "we just can't communicate," sometimes because "They" (parents, or adults generally) don't want to, sometimes because they can't.

Four out of five refer to failures of communication or understanding, or both.[2] This, in fact, is the one complaint most often voiced. Girls are somewhat more likely than boys to emphasize this aspect of the gap, although boys are at least as likely as girls to report that it is a problem.

The piling up of emphasis on lack of communication and understanding (implicit almost by definition) is less noteworthy than the range of feelings expressed. Often the point is made with intense resentment against failure of adults to try to understand, communicate, and explain.

At the same time, a substantial minority view the communication failure more philosophically, as natural, inevitable, and probably chronic. And a few display sympathetic indulgence. "They can't help it," "They have their own problems."

> "The problem with adults seems to be that for some reason or another, they do not appear to be able to see any reason for the things we do, when if they really thought about it, they could understand."
>
> "Personally, I believe that youth want to be understood yet would like to hold on to that certain mysterious wierdness adults sometimes attach to anyone labeled a youth. Similarly I think adults would like to understand teenagers but not if it means relinquishing the assumed image of all-knowing, mature and superior human being."
>
> "Also, parents fail to understand their children. There are times when a teen is really miserable and mixed up and perhaps isn't as 'smiley' and helpful as usual. But parents get very angry and rant about how you're making everybody miserable, and why don't you smile, and rot like that. Usually, it is hard to explain why you are so moody and depressed, so you can't tell your parents, and that gets them angry too. Sometimes I wish they would just go to a movie or something and leave me alone."
>
> "Understanding does not mean agreeing. Once an understanding is reached, the basis for a compromise is established."
>
> "Our parents are both reticent and communicative and they always seem to be one when it should be the other."

"They don't listen. If we try to talk to them about a problem, they are either so involved in giving advice that they don't hear us at all or they aren't listening in the first place."

"Most of the kids feel that it is just a lack of interest by both parties to talk to each other."

"One of the hard things to do is to sit down and talk and listen. This solves most of the problems at least for me."

Many other aspects of the gap are also mentioned, again with feelings that range from rage, through matter-of-fact acceptance, to (occasionally) a touch of empathy. Sometimes the points brought out represent elaboration of what and how "They" fail to understand. Sometimes they constitute additional and separate indictments. They include sins of omission, sins of commission, and conflict in values.

Within the Family

Sins of omission

Lagging considerably after the failure to understand and communicate, but nevertheless bulking larger than other complaints, is a cluster of protests against the failure of parents to grant to the teenager full status as an individual entitled to respect and trust. Parents, our reporters say, don't recognize the teenager's worth as an individual, they don't respect his opinions, they fail to recognize that his problems are important to him, they don't trust him. To some extent such failures are associated with failure to recognize his developmental status, the fact that he is partly grown up and worthy of certain responsibilities.[3] On the other hand, "They" are occasionally taxed with not making allowances for the teenager's youth, and expecting him to be more grown up than he is. Either way, the individual and his growth phase are felt to be belittled or ignored. A less salient part of the sins-of-omission cluster is failure to give teenagers the attention and love they need. Attention is specified a good deal more often than love, although in terms that suggest the two may be used almost synonymously. The kind of attention referred to is clearly not the kind represented by the suspicions and "nosiness" that are resented--although it might be difficult for some adults to define a clear line between the two. "They're too busy," "they don't take time," "they're too wrapped up in their own problems and fights," "it takes time to be a

good parent," "kids rebel in order to get attention," "they're too worn out from their work," "they don't give enough love," "it isn't real love."

> "I just wish that sometimes they would give us a chance to show them what we have learned."
>
> "We are told to act as adults and then treated as children."
>
> "The idea is that it is easier to bail your kids out of trouble than it is to teach them the difference between right and wrong."
>
> "But some are just ignored by the parents. When this happens, I think they find a boyfriend or someone to just leach on for affection. I know this can happen to anyone loved or unloved, wanted or unwanted, poor or rich, it mainly depends on that person's opinion, his actions and his thoughts."

Sins of commission

Objections to what parents do are almost as salient as objections to what they don't do, and some specific sins of commission are seen as rooted in more general sins of omission. As with most of the points made, every protest lodged is countered by a smaller and less vigorous defense. A few will report a more favorable picture of parents or--more often--will say that a favored few (including the writer) do not suffer from this problem. Or again, a few will blame "Them" for just the opposite of the offense charged by a larger number.

Leading all other sins of commission is the charge of rigidity and strictness. They are always sure they're right, they refuse to reconsider what they've said, once they've said it; they are given to arbitrary, over-strict rules and punishments, and to authoritarian attitudes. Too much of this, it is pointed out, will lead to evasion or lying on the part of teenagers. On the other hand, a few complain that many parents are over-indulgent and over-permissive, spoiling their children. One or two associate such indulgence with an effort to "buy love," adding that it doesn't work and only breeds disrespect on the part of the child.

> "The main thing adults do wrong is that they think things are either black or white, only positive or negative. No compromising. Having this attitude, just makes teens kind of 'burn'

inside, almost until they explode. I'll explode one of these days, and hit my dad right in the mouth. I'll regret it, but I'll do it."

"They are seeing...an adult attitude of superiority, conformity and base intolerance. Teenagers today are decidedly hostile over the 'lording' manner of most adults."

"The thing that adults fail to understand is not to hold their child too closely. It's like a puppy you always squeeze and hold, it's always trying to get away but if you let go and love it from afar, it comes back."

"Teens need guidance whether they ask for it or not and it's the parents duty to provide it."

"Parents mean well when they try to give you all the things that they never had. They want your life to be better than their's was. But they don't realize that they might be forcing something onto you, and when you 'fail them' or 'rebel,' they immediately hit you with, 'we've given you everything you've ever wanted,' or 'where did we go wrong?'"

"...Things that aren't bad but are horrible to the older generation. Say visiting a boy's house who is very trustworthy when the parents aren't home. The latter part is left off when you tell your parents what you did that day."

A number of sins of omission are seen as contributing to sins of commission. Lack of understanding, refusal to listen, lack of trust and respect for the teenager as an individual, lead parents to become "nosy," suspicious, and inconsiderate. "Dating" is discussed in connection with all these, as well as with old-fashioned strictness and conformity. Some parents, it is said, inquire into all details of a teenagers' social life, think they must monitor his dates, regulate his telephone conversations, and know his every move.[4]

A different kind of objection to parental behavior is reported by about one in ten of the correspondents, but reflects intense feeling among those who discuss it. This concerns parents who set a poor example for their children, especially those who "say one thing and do another." These are described with biting scorn as being "hypocritical," "phoney," "setting a bad example." They drink, they smoke, they tell half truths, they practice "loose morality," and at the same time urge their children to practice what the parents preach.

"Older people tell us what not to do, yet, they go right on and do the things they tell us not to do. Even in front of us. This goes along with smoking also."

"When an adult, such as a parent, sit in a chair saying you should not smoke or even drink, and then sits back to a cigarette and a can of beer, you just can't help but tune out on anything he happens to say afterwards, whether it be of benefit or not. And what are you to think when you see pops cheating on his income tax? Where is all the rally around the flag spirit and the honesty and integrity which supposedly made Americans strong? Or did every big businessman in America today get the capital to start a business by cheating on his income tax?"

"Some of my friends and I went to a party the other night at a swim pool area and they had policemen there to make sure that we didn't bring in any drinks of any kind. They had bars at this place but we weren't allowed to enter this bar. We were checked, everyone of us. Later, I saw one of the guys that checked us, a temporary policeman, and he was very much drunk. Yet he kept on checking the kids who were coming in. This was very disgusting to all of us there."

A smaller but equally vehement group reports complaints of parents who "yell at their kids" and embarrass them in front of others, who "nag" or "jump at them."

Two items rank lower than might have been expected on the list of parental restrictions: (1) access to the family car is mentioned by fewer than one in twenty, and never as a major point of conflict; (2) restrictions on spending money are mentioned only by four girls, and given little emphasis by them. This may be another reflection of the affluent society, although some of our reporters speak for young people whose families are far from prosperous.

Sex differences

Although the same complaints are voiced by boys and by girls, there is a sex difference in salience as judged by frequency of mention. For both boys and girls, lack of understanding and communication lead all complaints by a wide margin. Among others, girls put most emphasis on lack of respect and trust, often perceived as prying and interfering with social activities. Girls much more often than boys complain about over-supervision of dating and other aspects of social life. Boys put

most emphasis on rigidity and strictness, and--as noted below--on autonomy in general. Lack of attention and love also rank higher for girls than for boys among objections to parental attitudes and behavior.

Conflict of values and priorities

Over one-third of the reporters explicitly refer to value clashes between the generations, and many more discuss value-related points in connection with other complaints. Often the references are general: "We don't have the same values." "We have two opposing philosophies." But more often the conflict is stated or revealed in a specific context. "They" are accused of insufficient interest in the over-riding problems of our day, including war, poverty, and racism--an accusation discussed in more detail below. "They" are accused of materialism, including over-emphasis on money, possessions, economic security, status, individual achievement. Corollary to both these accusations is the charge that "They" emphasize trivia at the expense of really important things, insist on conformity in matters of dress and grooming, judge individuals by externals, and in general apply a distorted measuring scale to life.

All three sets of charges are inter-related and at times appear to be different facets of the same indictment. Nevertheless it is interesting that in frequency of mention the materialism cluster figures less prominently than might be expected on the basis of current expert opinion and discussions of youth. Explicit mention of the other two is far more frequent.

In a few instances, teachers were favorably compared with parents, as being closer to teenagers in regard to values, although one or two comparisons gave the preference to parents.

Do clothes make the man? Disapproval of emphasis on non-essentials is linked with indignant protests against adult objections to teenage preferences in hair styles, costume and grooming. Over one-fourth of the correspondents report such objections. Although the subject is as likely to be raised by girls as by boys, the salient feature in the comments of both is hair styles for boys. In addition to specific mention of male hair styles, they are included by implication in general references to the view that "parents don't understand fashions are changing" or that they think teenagers are "not responsible" if they are not dressed conservatively.

A very few (five in all) criticize long-haired boys, one going so far as to agree with his parents that "long hair is disgusting." The overwhelming report, however, is that teenagers defend the right of teenagers to self

determination in dress and grooming, even though the defenders themselves may not exercise that right in ways deplored by their elders. Many of those who do not themselves cultivate extreme sartorial forms of expression and rebellion appear to understand and sympathize with those who do, and are ready and able to interpret them.[5]

On the one hand, over-concern with external appearance is condemned as reflecting a distorted sense of values. On the other hand, it is protested as a violation of individual autonomy. Because of this dual significance, the reporters imply, teenage costume and grooming have taken on the attributes of symbol, of language, of badge, and of weapon--thus acquiring for the young an importance somewhat at odds with their objections to emphasizing external details.

> "They (parents) argue a sloppy appearance makes a sloppy person. Most of my friends disagree completely."
>
> "It doesn't seem logical that racial strife, stabbings, and gang fights were initiated all because of a pair of socks."
>
> "Black parents because of the conditioning they've had by 'the Man' think that the Afros and African clothing their children wear is ugly. One example of the difference of opinion is a friend of mine who had an Afro. His father made him cut it for graduation so the family won't be ashamed."
>
> "For the first quarter of the school year I kept my hair short and very conservative--I made straight A's. Now that's what they wanted me to do and I did it (make the grades, not the hair). But, nevertheless, I did what they wanted me to, without any qualms, but I ask them to let me let my hair grow long and the answer is an emphatic 'no!'. I got the grades, either way (and that gives them satisfaction)--why not let me have my way?"

"Times have changed"

Sometimes our correspondents try to explain the value differences they report. Some of these discussions are bitter, some dispassionate, a few indulgent. The chief extenuation is that because today's parents grew up during the depression they attach great significance to economic security, and want to give their children things the parents never had. Today's teenagers, on the other hand, are pictured as growing up in affluence, taking physical comforts for granted and attaching little weight to them. Such comments are made by less than one in fifteen,

and certainly not by those who report--sometimes very articulately and forcefully--the views of the non-affluent.

> "We had much our parents didn't and had 'no' said to us less and things vastly easier."

> "Today's young people do not have to worry like their parents did about money and making a living. They can be concerned with other things..."

An explanation offered by a much larger number (almost half) applies to disagreements about individual matters as well as values and broader social problems. "The world is changing too fast for them." Often the statement is made as a matter of fact, without explicit criticism. But more often it reflects criticism or blame of adults as resistant to change. They don't realize how much things have changed, they don't understand "new ways" (morals, ideas, music, language), they don't recognize new freedoms. According to some, the adults not only fail to understand change but they definitely do not want it, while the younger generation definitely does. Thus, in a sense, change itself becomes a value--described as a positive value for the young and as a negative value for recalcitrant adults.[6]

> "They (parents) fail to realize that we are a new generation and that we are not content with hand-me-down policy."

> "Morals, dress lengths, prices just about everything has changed, and if the future is so important we must keep up with the present."

> "In fact, some felt that the great advances in technology which were unheard of when my parents were growing up is a major cause of the generation gap. To them this gap is significantly wider than in years past."

> "The 'gap' is the result of 'hard-core' adults who are trying to slow down the times and hard core teenagers who are trying to speed it up."

> "They have carved their own little niche in society and are fearful least change will destroy it. We understand such

fear. We can forsee the same fear ourselves when the next generation want change."

"But other parents despise (in a way) their teenage sons or daughters because of the many advantages teenagers have today."

Most bitter of all is the reported resentment against parents who want to make their children "into a carbon copy of themselves," a complaint associated with broad conflicts in values and also with intra-family arguments about dating, dress, and other points of parental interference with personal affairs and activities. "When I was your age" is a particularly detested phrase.

"They try to equate every modern situation with 'when I was your age.' They don't always come right out and say it and they might try hard not to think this way but it always comes out that way."

"Parents tend to look at their own youthful rebellion in a rosy light of nostalgia while bitterly condemning their sons and daughters for variations of the same behavior of which they themselves were guilty."

Some parents are O.K.

The question wording invited a negative response: "What are the main things that adults do or say or fail to understand that bother teenagers so much?" It is significant, therefore, that the responses did not picture parents and adults generally in wholly negative terms. About one in ten of the correspondents, as noted earlier, explicitly excluded himself and sometimes also his friends from generation gap problems. And almost one in ten--usually the same correspondents--explicitly state that they share the values of their own parents. Very few of these describe themselves as "conservative." The more common explanation is that the parents are progressive in their thinking, understand young people, keep up with the times, etc. Sometimes such parents are contrasted with the parents of friends or acquaintances--that is, they are viewed as exceptions to the rule, nice but unusual. Explicit statements of parent-child agreement on values were usually accompanied by other evidence of good parent-child relations, especially good understanding and communication.

There were, in addition, statements by others that some parents do understand the younger generation, and do respect their individual needs and rights.

None of these comments amounts to unqualified approval of the older generation, but all do constitute qualifications to disapproval, and a considerable number represent unqualified appreciation of the reporter's own parents.

> "After I got this questionnaire, I thought and thought about what my parents didn't understand about me. It took me almost a month, but I realized that my parents are pretty good about understanding me. (Heavens! I'll probably be ostracized from my group for saying that!)"
>
> "We feel that other than this 'parentishness' the adults with whom we are closely associated are not terribly disagreeable."
>
> "I am thought to be extremely lucky because I get along with my parents....I am the exception."
>
> "I have met some of my friends parents they actually do seem to understand their children. How they do this I do not know."
>
> "If teenagers would stop and think, being a parent is probably one of the hardest jobs there is."
>
> "Please don't get me wrong. After reading through this letter it sounds like my mother is just a nagging old lady. She isn't. I know she loves me and I love her but we just can't get it across to each other."

The Social Scene

"The mess the world is in"

Slightly less than one-third of the correspondents confined their responses to general consideration of whether there is or is not a generation gap. The remainder divided rather evenly between those who referred only to intra-family relations and issues, those who referred only to social problems and issues, and those who talked about both. Thus, of those who wrote in relatively specific terms, about two-thirds (something less than half of all the correspondents) mentioned attitudes toward society and social problems. Although over half of those responding did not raise such issues, the substantial proportion who did is impressive.

To the extent that one can judge from earlier surveys, this is probably a larger proportion than would have commented on social problems in response to similar questions in the middle fifties.

Among the conflicts in values and goals, noted earlier, are attitudes toward society and social problems, with adults generally described as deficient in social concern and commitment. The positive social goals attributed to youth are pictured with varying degrees of specificity: to end war, to cure poverty, to "stop evils," to promote "spiritual and mental welfare," to reform political processes, to further peace, love, and brotherhood, to engage in community service. The inevitable counter-point, associated with almost every point made, is presented by very few indeed. Teenagers, say these few dissenters, are not really so idealistic themselves, but are in fact materialistic and lack positive goals. Less than two percent of the correspondents sound this note with regard to values and social issues, although many more criticize specific behavior or attitudes, or specific small groups of teenagers.

To judge from the reports of these future college students, our campuses are not likely to express less criticism of adults and of society in the years ahead. While some of the correspondents (as noted above) express contentment with their own families, and similar feelings among their friends, no one reported that teenagers are content with society as it is. Those who did mention society or social problems did so in a critical way, expressing dismay at the situation and blaming adults for allowing the world to get into "this mess."

Some restrict their comments to general observations, remarking that parents and adults generally are not really involved in or concerned about pressing social, political and international problems, or that they talk about such problems but don't really want to do anything about them.

Among the specific problems of society mentioned are, in order of frequency, those relating to riots, to protests and disorders (in the cities and on campus); to war (including the Vietnam war); to race problems and racism; and to poverty.

> "It would be foolish, of course, to say that the older generation does not value peace, liberty, etc. But I personally believe that if one were to generalize about the attitudes of the older generation, using the facts of constant war, decaying cities, corruption in government and business, etc. one would have to conclude, and justifiably so, that the 'older generation' tends to be materialistic, dishonest, and hypocritical."

"...what really annoys many teenagers is the 'accepting' view adults have. They accept war, poverty, hunger as unchangeable. The teenagers look at war for what it is--man killing man senselessly. They see race riots, starvation and campus trouble. No wonder they're disgusted."

"...I personally am bothered by things...that seem to me to be crazy. I feel that something should be done about it right now. Adults say that they also think this thing is illogical but they do not do anything about it. Maybe this is because they have lived with this problem for so long that they cannot see it any longer. Whereas we as teenagers do see these problems, but in another ten years we probably will have forgotten them."

"Society is one of the main problems, because adults try to live by their rules and teenagers try to break the rules which they don't want to live by."

"We can't expect people over 30 to accept a whole new set of values over night just because we're tired of civilization the way it is now."

Protest. Comments about forms of protest are far more likely to disapprove than to approve violent and disruptive dissent. Nevertheless, no doubt is left that those who are moved to discuss such matters at all are in sympathy with the reasons for active efforts to bring about change. About one in twenty reports the view that "shock treatment" in the form of violence and disruption may be necessary in order to "awaken the sleeping generation." Almost twice as many, however, see a need to keep violent dissidents within bounds and to promote needed social change through more moderate means.

"Also, violent marches and occupation of college buildings seem to be carrying things too far. However, many of my friends feel that at times, a peaceful march can be important to make grievances known. The inability of peaceful marches to remain peaceful is a major problem; and if there is any threat of violence, the march could prove detrimental to the cause. Students aren't going to get very far if they bring on more adult disapproval with every march."

"Oh, one more thing, if you happen to speak to President Nixon, please commend him for me in telling the college presidents to crack down on students disrupting at colleges.

A college is a place to learn--if the students don't like it, they can go someplace else!"

"They are out revolting and demonstrating trying to establish a better society, but instead, they are making the present society worse. The young people's views should be expressed, but in a peaceful way."

"If a person truly believes what he is doing is right for him he should do it, but if he is just following the crowd he should stop and make sure he sincerely believes in what he is doing. If the individual doesn't know what he believes he should not take any harsh action until he finds out."

"My friends are repelled by violent revolution they seek rather, educated evolution."

"They want to make it better. They would like to build it over, but this is impossible. So, some of them decide to take it apart, piece by piece, physically, in order to get their point across."

"We do not want to destroy, but if this is what it takes to get adults to listen and understand this is what we must do. Things must change they cannot remain as they are for as they are they will surely destroy us."

War. All comments concerning war in general and most of those concerning the Vietnam war are strongly negative. In the views of those who comment on the subject at all, war does not make sense and this war is immoral. That this view is not necessarily unanimous is, of course, suggested by the majority who make no mention of war and the minority who avow agreement with parental values (although some of the parents involved--often described as "liberal" or "progressive"--probably also oppose the war). The one clear statement that can be made is that, among those who are enough involved to volunteer comments about it, war in general is seen as an evil that should no longer be tolerated and the Vietnam war is far more likely to be condemned than supported.

"We have to fill out c.o. forms to explain to you why we shouldn't kill, but you're the ones who should have to fill out forms telling us why we should kill."

"True, not all adults support the draft, but the collective adult, representative of society, must bear the blame for it, and so this contributes in large measure to the 'generation gap.'"

"...one group of them says it wonderfully. 'Make love not war' and if one substitutes poverty, hunger, and other ills of the world for 'war' in the expression one has what the teenagers who cause the Generation Gap really want."

Racism. Many did not mention race problems, but all who did were emphatic about the need to eliminate prejudice, discrimination, and inequalities, and no one reported endorsement of a "go-slow" policy. Perhaps because of the nature of our coverage, little regional difference was perceptible in the views expressed. Among the very few who referred to interracial dating, all defended the practice as quite acceptable to youth though not to parents.

"I, as a teenager, think that because the older generations have tolerated racism and other forms of human cruelty, their concepts are wrong and should be abandoned."

"We are very concerned about many grave problems, which threaten to destroy the advantages that civilization has given us. We are concerned about over-population, racism, poverty, pollution, and most of all, oppression and the stifling of the individual in what is supposed to be a democratic society. The reactions that we have seen to these concerns are very frustrating. School de-segregation guidelines are relaxed..., poverty programs are stifled because they might hurt the taxpayer, industry successfully blocks pollution control, and those who wish to democratise America are labeled Communist and suppressed, often violently."

Poverty. The subject of poverty was among the least frequent in comments about specific social problems. To some extent, however, economic inequalities were implied in references to social problems generally, and in connection with comments about race problems. One black correspondent was forceful and bitter about the difficulties of the "near-poor."

Our black correspondents

On the whole, the views of black teenagers resemble those of whites with regard to the existence and nature of the generation gap, although the

emphasis is clearly influenced by keen awareness of their special problems. The proportions of those affirming or denying a generation gap are comparable. However, those who belittle the problem do so with special scorn, pointing out that in comparison with other problems this one is trifling and even frivolous, and that the real gaps are between "Uncle Toms" and all the others, regardless of age. Although black students were more likely than whites to mention problems relating to race, they were no more emphatic in affirming the need to eliminate prejudice, discrimination, and inequalities. Some reports from black students include poignant discussions of the "real" problems that dwarf such considerations as the generation gap.

> "I am one of the twelve Negroes who attends a predominately white school of about 3,000 or more...I'm just like a walking test at school. Now the Negro is on stage, performing before an all white audience, trying to sway and correct their opinion of blacks."

Teenagers' Views on Teenagers

Who is to blame?

In response to the specific inquiry about "the other side of the coin," over half of the reporters find some readiness to concede that there is fault on the part of both generations. Since about one-third did not respond to this question, the two-sided picture characterizes a considerable majority of those who discuss it at all, suggesting an effort to be fair and balanced reporters, and a recognition that parents have rights as well as obligations.

A number of teenage sins are specified, some of them mirror-images of those ascribed to the older generation. Teenagers, like adults, are accused of not listening and not communicating--almost as often as a similar charge is brought against adults. The often unfulfilled obligation to give understanding, trust, and respect to their elders is affirmed by a considerable number (about two out of five). The young are criticized (by about one in seven) for not realizing that after all "they are still kids" and can learn from adults--although half as many report belief that teenagers really do know more about today's world than their parents. They are occasionally described as spoiled and over-indulged, though again by far fewer than criticize parental strictness and rigidity. It is granted that some teens can't be trusted and do lie

to or deceive their parents. Partly this is seen as a reaction to overstrictness, but sometimes as a response to over-permissiveness or lack of attention.

> "Some kids think its all the parents fault, but I think its half and half."
>
> "A teenager can't expect to get everything he wants even if his parents can afford to give it to him. But neither can a parent expect him to bow to their every whim and be a good boy or girl."
>
> "Teenagers are likewise guilty of not wishing to listen to the views of their parents assuming that because their parents are old they are idiots, all we ask is that the parents do not try to live our generation for us."
>
> "I think both sides need to do less talking and more listening."

In frequency and vehemence, criticisms of the older generation far outweigh criticisms of teenagers, and are less likely to be qualified or restricted only to an unrepresentative few. The prevailing view is definitely that the teenagers are not chiefly to blame for the generation gap, and about one in ten exonerates them wholly. One correspondent remarks in surprise that she had never considered such a possibility. Another reports that when he asked his peers whether it was partly the fault of teenagers, "they modestly said no."

> "You must stop force-feeding ideas and try to reason with us; and you must listen to us. We've listened to you. Did we ever have a choice? You control education and the media."
>
> "They are already blaming young people for the state of the world today, when, if the blame belongs to anyone, it belongs to them."
>
> "But I just happen to think that the older generations are far <u>more</u> mistake prone, and will not face the reality when they are wrong."

<u>Teenagers as a "minority group"</u>

Among the most indignant protests reported are objections to prejudice against teenagers as a group, voiced in some form by about one in three,

and levied against parents, adults generally, and the mass media in particular. Almost one-fourth of all the correspondents grant that "some teenagers are really bad," and a few state emphatically that the disruptive activists should be restrained. Such statements, however, are typically coupled with declarations that the great majority are O.K. and should not suffer for the misdeeds of that small misguided fraction. Granted that some teenagers are blameworthy, they point out that the same can be said of some adults. Parents, they say, distrust their own children because of what a few teenagers do. Adults generally if they read about a few teenagers misbehaving, assume that all teenagers are like that. They expect the worst and act in such a way as to invite it. Some are afraid of teenagers and resent them. Such attitudes are expressed in unpleasant and sometimes discriminatory behavior which can act as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

> "Teenagers don't judge all adults because of men like Lee Harvey Oswald or Sirhan Sirhan. Yet adults judge all of us by the hippies and potheads in colleges and in the Village."
>
> "I find it difficult to walk into a store (unless it is a store or department that deals solely in teens needs) without being closely watched by sales ladies. And usually any adult will be waited on before a teenager, even if the teen has been waiting longer."
>
> "It seems they feel that if one girl goes around with every boy in town and doesn't care what she does, that their daughter will do the same. They don't have enough faith in their own child-raising."
>
> "They are so concerned about the 1% of 'bad' kids who might get into trouble that schools are run much like prisons with a rule book 1000 pages long."
>
> "A great problem is 'Parental Bigotry,' that is discrimination merely on basis of age, not merit. The attitude of 'You're only 17, what do you know' is one of the most odious of all."

The media, it is charged, pander to and aggravate such attitudes, by playing up only the bad and ignoring the good.

> "They are just that small minority of 'wierdos' that there has always been, but, with the more publicity, they seem to be a larger group."

"With all our communication systems newsmen (and others) have been looking for something new to tell listeners. Then the hippies came along."

"If the news media could only tell about the large majority of young people who are clean cut, hard working teens. But these teens who don't create problems just don't make the news."

"At our high school, there has been one small peaceful, peace march (a walk downtown) and the paper called the school militant."

The deviant few

Mention of drugs (by about one in ten) came in only incidentally, as an occasional specific under broad inter-generation issues. Use of "pot" received very little support, and heavier drugs none at all. Drug users were on occasion included among the minority of teenagers described as "really bad." On the other hand, some sympathetic interpretation is offered of the pressures that drive the few into drug use.

"The thing that really ruins it for the majority of responsible, intelligent young people is the behavior of some irresponsible members of the younger generation such as drunken driving, 'delinquency' (vandalism, gangs, etc.) irresponsible use of drugs, etc. This gives the older generation something to point at and hold against all people under 21."

"These kids are looking for something better like maybe through drugs, boy you can't find it that way!"

"A lot more people drink and use drugs because it makes them feel stable in an unstable world."

"Parents do not understand that teenagers look at drugs as adults look at drinking. Many teenagers feel smoking marijuana is just another way to be sociable."

It is noteworthy that smoking and drinking by teenagers receive less incidental mention than drug use. Considerably fewer than one in ten refer to either. Those who do are more likely to criticize adults

than teenagers, but mention of indulgence in either drinking or smoking tends to be critical.

Hippies and Yippies. Hippies and Yippies are referred to by about one in ten, chiefly in connection with the tendency of adults to blame all teenagers for the misguided deviance of only a few. "In the parents minds all teens are hippies." Less than half as often, the comments are neutral or reflect sympathy with their motives and aims, although not necessarily with their ways of acting out their convictions. One correspondent carefully distinguishes between "real hippies" and "pseudo hippies."

> "Hippies are a product of our generation but the beatniks were a part of their generation."
>
> "All of the publicity given to these Hippies and teenage gangs is ruining the image of the decent teenager, which is in ever so much a majority."
>
> "A minority group such as hippies, militants, drug addicts, draft dodgers--ruin the reputation of the majority of good teenagers and terrify responsible parents."
>
> "Maybe that is why hippies dress as they do. They want to bring to their parents attention that no matter how unkempt they are on the outside they can still love their fellow man. I sincerely believe in the hippies belief of love, but I don't agree with the way they go about it. When they stop someone from speaking with their yelling."
>
> "My parents (and most of my other elders) think that because someone's hair is long, he or she (if hers is very long) is automatically a hippie. It's not true. Maybe that individual just thinks that he looks better the way he is. It takes more than hair to create a hippie."

Our own thing

Two phrases prominent in adult discussions of teenage youth are "the drive for autonomy" and "the identity crisis." In one form or another, the drive for autonomy is conspicuous throughout the responses.[8] The boys are more likely than the girls to report a generalized protest against interference with "doing their own thing." (Almost one-third of the boys spontaneously mentioned this general protest.)[9] The girls are more likely to report objections to parental interference with dating and social activities. And the two sexes (somewhat surprisingly)

give equal emphasis to adult preoccupation with hair styles, costume and grooming. This effort to control teenagers' appearance is seen, on the one hand, as a defect in values--overemphasizing the trivial, judging the outward appearance rather than the inner man--and, on the other hand, as undue interference with individual autonomy. The excesses of some teenagers with regard to their appearance are not approved or indulged in by the majority. At the same time, they are more likely to be condoned and accepted as symbolic assertion of autonomy and as a rebuke to distorted adult values than to be criticized. There is a considerable tendency to contrast the reprehensible emphasis of adults on trivia and externals with the teenagers' more laudable interest in broad positive goals and essential individual worth.

> "What does the teenager do? Rebel. Parents are always looking after their teenagers like their parents looked after them. But times are changing and this brings more freedom and independence to the teenager. He wants to lead his own life and not the one that his parents try to force him in to. Parents, WAKE UP!!! He has his own life to live."

> "Teenagers are stubborn and want things done their way or no way at all. But they think, although they don't want to admit, that they can always fall back, without shame, on their parents methods if they fail to succeed. Meantime, they're trying to do their own thing."

> "Another thing kids do that is bad is purposely going against a command to show their individuality and rebellious attitude instead of because they think the rule is wrong. This is commonly called bull-headed behavior or assinine stupidity. This is the kid's tool to get the parents goat."

The search for identity. Since the question focused on adults' behavior and lapses, it is probably not surprising that direct or indirect references to teenage identity problems were rare in the responses. Nevertheless, occasional reminders note that young people are changing and groping, that one aim of young people is to "find themselves," that they are still in the process of discovering who they really are, and trying to develop into the best self they are capable of being. Occasional comments such as this, viewed in relation to the explicit insistence on autonomy and on positive goals, suggest that the search for identity may exist without being verbalized and even without necessarily being perceived by the seeker.

"I still have two years of high school left, and I intend to keep struggling in that time to be able to live the life and learn the things I need to, as it is necessary if I wish to be the type of person I think I am."

"That's all young men and women are trying to do is find out a little more about the most important person in the world, themself."

"No person is worth much if they do not search for 'the right way to live.' You can't borrow someone's belief or be made to have <u>their</u> belief. At 17, many teenagers are experimenting--trying to find a belief that they can build a lifetime upon."

"But it is a time of great confusion, growing up, one realizes he must be himself. But, his parents, who have always cared for him and ruled his life aren't always aware of their child's new self. They don't understand he's changing and perhaps still try to run their chicks life and don't want to let go. But the child may not understand himself while trying himself out..."

<u>"My generation will inherit this world"</u>

A number of our correspondents are quite explicit about their future opportunity to improve our society, and their determination to make the most of it. "We are the leaders of tomorrow," they occasionally declare, adding that they hope to improve on what their elders have done. A few suggest that the older generation is reluctant to give up control and make way for the new generation, but more simply take their future dominance for granted. They clearly believe in their own moral superiority, and in general are optimistic about the prospect of improving the society they will inherit.

"We all know what kind of shape the world is in today, after the older generation had charge of it. Today's teenagers want to try and fix it, their own way, and if we don't succeed, it will be through our own mistakes, not through the mistakes of our parents. And we'll be the ones to have the power of changing the world soon."

"This country is the greatest in the world, but it still has its faults, and the youth should be listened to because they see them more closely than those who have abided by them."

"We will be living in the world longer than they will and want a hand in shaping it. We've got to live in the world long after they are dead and have no more interest in it."

For the most part, the self-proclaimed leaders of tomorrow assume that their present superiority is a matter of morals, values, and to some extent education, and that the implementing of these is yet to be achieved. A few, however, consider it already established. Although they are far outnumbered by those who grant to adults greater experience and knowledge, and some right to respect, an unabashed few (considerably less than one in ten) proclaim that today's teenagers know more--even today--than their parents do, and consider themselves better qualified to deal with today's problems.

"Things they learned in high school, we learn in elementary school. Things they learned in college, we learn in high school."

"Adults think they know it all. They really don't because teenagers today have said and done a lot more things than the adults would have ever thought of doing."

Conspicuous by its absence

Religion does not emerge as an important issue in the generation gap. It receives some form of mention by about one in ten, most often as a cursory matter-of-fact reference to church or Sunday school attendance. A very few (about one in thirty) give some indication of real religious commitment, occasionally as a reference to "good Christian upbringing" or the value of belief in God, appearing in context and terms that imply agreement between parents and children. Only one reporter speaks of the search for a satisfying religion, and only one explicitly implies outright parent-child disagreement with regard to religion. Even these, however, do not suggest that the issue is an important element in parent-child relations.[10]

"Many kids learn to tune the parents out when they chirp the good of life, religion or how to keep their room--namely neat."

"I feel that religion is the only linking backbone in a society, in a group, or in an individual to love man as he is and that is as a human being."

"Religion is no longer the most important phase of life. Teenagers feel if a person believes in God, they should show

respect in their own individual way. There shouldn't be certain rules and dates for worship. Others feel God is the answer to all unanswered questions."

Response to Youth Reports

Our reporters' insistence on the need for understanding and communication between the generations, and the repeated wish for respect and recognition as individuals whose opinions deserve a hearing, are reinforced by the nature of their response to an invitation to communicate with their Government. The response rate (63 percent) in itself is remarkably high for mail interviews, which as a rule evoke considerably less than a 33 percent response. And over one-fourth of the correspondents went to some trouble to discuss the questions with their peers before answering, often indicating in their answers how many had been interviewed and how their opinions lined up.

Not many commented directly on the request to contribute to Youth Reports, but only three such comments were negative while twenty were strongly positive. In addition, interest and enthusiasm were revealed by the remarks of many others, showing eagerness to continue the correspondence or expressing hope that their contributions would be really helpful.

"My survey lasted five days, interviewing as many as possible..."

"The following opinions [twelve] are results of a survey taken among a teenage club of which I am a member."

"You wouldn't like to know what my 'friends' think about it, you'd like to know what I think about it but you're afraid whoever I, or anybody else who gets this letter is, will be shy or dishonest or anything else like that and we won't write a frank opinion. Well that's just what the generation gap is all about. It's not just a parent-child or teacher-student misunderstanding. It's people who don't ask a straight question because they don't trust we'll give a straight answer."

"This questionnaire is just the typical kind of ineffectual thing the 'older generation' would do--pardon my criticism--perhaps you'll get the new communication."

"I, as an individual, hope that you will send questions more than three or four times a year because it seems to open things I may not really think of on my own."

"I hope I have been of some help to you...in narrowing this gap. I enjoyed writing this short thesis. Thank you for letting me!"

"I'm afraid I haven't answered this second question (about what teenagers do) well enough. But I would like to thank you for asking it. It has gotten me to thinking about it. I plan to try real hard to find out and then cure anything I might do or won't do to worsen this situation. I also want other teenagers to think about this aspect of the problem."

"One excellent step in bridging the Generation Gap is Youth Reports. I hope it continues and becomes more frequent over the coming years. My greatest hope is that the administration in D. C. will sometimes heed the recommendations of youth."

"Thank you, on behalf of myself and my friends, for this chance to sound off."

"Thank you, great impersonal governmental edifice--for the first chance I've had to express myself."

"I don't think it is a problem that can ever be solved, but Good Luck anyway. Maybe the government is good for something, and you can at least ease the pressure."

Highlights in Brief

The contrast between today's high school students and those of a decade ago is underlined by the remarkably high proportion responding to wide open questions about the generation gap with references to broad social problems. Those who discuss the gap in relatively specific terms (over two-thirds of the correspondents) divide rather evenly between discussing only intra-family affairs, discussing only social issues, and talking about both. That is, they are twice as likely to include as to omit reference to social problems.

Tomorrow's college students, as represented in these responses, are not likely to be less critical than today's of the society they will inherit. None of those who comment on our social scene reflects approval. On the other hand, disapproval of violent and disruptive activism far outweighs the occasional warning that "shock treatment" is necessary in order to produce remedial action.

Among those who discuss specific social or political issues, feeling is strong against the Vietnam war and against a "go slow" policy with regard to race problems. War, racism and poverty are seen as social ills that can and must be cured.

Leading all charges against the older generation, by a large margin, is failure to understand and communicate. Other accusations include rigidity, self-righteousness, distorted values, and hypocrisy.

Despite the clear invitation to criticism, Youth Reporters find some good words to say about some parents.

Adults generally and the mass media in particular are blamed for judging all teenagers by the few who are "really bad." Considerable confidence is expressed that tomorrow's leaders will right the wrongs their elders have tolerated--a strongly moral emphasis by a generation for whose morals many adults are concerned.

The overwhelming insistence of these Youth Reporters on the importance of understanding and communication is documented--implicitly and often explicitly--by their ready and often eloquent response to the invitation to communicate with their Government.

APPENDIX A

Notes on Relevant Polls and Surveys

A number of polls and surveys, conducted during the last two decades, touch on points brought out by the Youth Reporters. Although for the most part they reported answers to highly structured questionnaires, and two of them involved college rather than high school students, some of their findings are relevant to the present study, with regard to opinion patterns and salience of specific points. References are listed on pages 32 and 33.

1. The Fortune survey reports a majority of college students saying "there is a large generation gap today," and approximately one-fifth saying that it exists but has been exaggerated. The CBS News survey reports a smaller proportion (25 percent) saying there is a large gap, while 72 percent say it exists but has been exaggerated. Although the term "generation gap" is fairly recent, the Purdue Poll over a decade ago found that complaints about "the Parent Problem" were more common in anonymous letters than in answers to structured questionnaires.

2. Two decades ago, in 1949, 35 percent of the teenagers polled by Purdue said that parents usually understood problems of teens, while 40 percent said they sometimes did and 24 percent said "hardly ever."

3. In the mid-fifties, failure to recognize developmental status was the parental problem most frequently mentioned in the Purdue letters. Somewhat earlier (1949), in the Purdue Poll, 79 percent complained that their parents usually or sometimes underestimated their true maturity.

4. Fully 60 percent of respondents in the Purdue Poll felt that what happened on dates should be discussed with parents, and 33 percent said they would like more parental counseling. Most of the teenagers surveyed in the University of Michigan studies considered parental regulations legitimate and in their own interest, despite a good many complaints about parental controls on hours, dating, spare time activities and friends.

5. The emphasis on self determination in matters of dress is in marked contrast to findings of more than a decade ago. Although 17 percent of the boys in the Michigan study said they would like to utilize their own ideas about personal grooming, 45 percent said they would accept the ideas of their parents. In the Purdue Poll, slightly over half felt that parents should sometimes or usually choose the kind of clothes their children should wear, though 47 percent said this should hardly ever be the case.

6. Attitudes toward change are highlighted by the Fortune survey, in which the sentence "The main trouble with the older generation..." was most often completed by the charge that "they are reluctant to accept change." This answer was given by well over one-third of the respondents.

7. "If one asks the average teenage boy or girl whether he's concerned about these large and pressing /social/ problems, he'll say that indeed he is. But when he writes a letter about the things that bother him, only rarely does he mention bombs, politics, or bills. Just before /The American Teenager/ went to press, we collected and read 2,000 such letters. Only once is the bomb mentioned at all, and then merely parenthetically." (p. 94) This seeming unconcern of the fifties is in marked contrast to the findings of recent studies, notably those of CBS News and Fortune, in which a sizable number of young people are challenging American traditional and societal values and demanding a voice on a wide range of issues--war, race problems, civil disobedience, poverty, politics, etc.

   The average teenager polled by Purdue had quite "mild" ideas about his rights, and thought that obedience and respect for authority were the most important habits for a child to learn, according to The American Teenager. The authors deplored what they termed "a massive and frightening rejection of the basic theory of democratic government," as demonstrated by answers to questions based on the freedoms spelled out in the Bill of Rights and political ideologies such as Communism and Fascism. "These tragic results seem to confirm beyond much doubt that our traditional freedom is already in danger." (p. 194) This fear finds little support in Youth Reports or in today's participatory politics.

   Responses in both University of Michigan studies, in the middle fifties, also focus on personal rather than social issues. When asked what they worried about most, boys and girls did not mention

social problems, but dealt rather with achievement, acceptance by others, family problems, and economic pressures. The adult they most admired was rarely a public figure, and traits identified as admirable did not indicate concern for society. Their concerns for the future dealt overwhelmingly with their own educational and occupational decisions rather than with any involvement in problems of society.

8. Over a decade ago, the average teenager was described by Remmers and Radler as "much more conformist than individualist." (p. 238, The American Teenager.)

9. In the Michigan studies, as in Youth Reports, a similar sex difference occurs, with boys more likely than girls to express their need for autonomy.

10. The inconspicuous place of religion in these reports by high school students contrasts with the CBS News report that it represents a major point of difference between parents and college students. It is possible that this particular generation gap will widen when our reporters reach college. It is also possible, and seems more probable, that a difference which emerges in answers to a structured question will not achieve salience when answers are free and unstructured.

    In answer to a question by the Purdue Poll in the early fifties, 69 percent of the teenagers replied that they attended religious services weekly or more often. Seventy-eight percent indicated agreement with the religious beliefs of both parents and only eight percent indicated disagreement with both.

References

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studies of adolescent boys and girls done by the Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

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APPENDIX B

Panel Coverage

Since it was not possible, at this initial stage, to explore the opinions of all high school youth, it was decided as a first step to set up panels that would give coverage of high school students enrolled in college preparatory courses in metropolitan areas. Since more than two-thirds of the nation's youth are in metropolitan areas, this is the largest group we could hope to reach. And since those enrolled in college preparatory courses are the ones most likely to be articulate in writing, this limitation was accepted. It is assumed that the very poor will be underrepresented and that the opinions tapped will represent largely the middle-class population that comprises the largest segment in the country and the population of tomorrow's college campuses.

The cooperating school systems were asked to select correspondents randomly from lists of students enrolled in college preparatory courses. Three metropolitan areas were selected to represent each of the four main regions of the United States designated by the Bureau of the Census. Two metropolitan areas are the largest in the country. The remainder have populations between 200,000 and 1,000,000.

In each except the two largest cities, four schools were selected, three drawing from the central city and one from the suburbs. Of the central city schools, two were chosen to represent predominantly white students and one predominantly black. In the two largest cities the numbers were doubled. In each school, we requested that eight students be selected: four tenth grade and four eleventh grade (1968-69 school year), with two boys and two girls from each class. Only one school administration refused. We replaced this city with another from the same section of the country. Due to a variety of delays, the setting up of lists extended from April to August, 1969, and sending out of inquiries was accordingly protracted.

Responses were received from 63 percent of the 398 who received invitations to become "Youth Reporters." (Nine inquiries were returned because of wrong address.)

As is typical, the response rate was higher for girls than for boys. Of those responding, 57 percent were girls. However, boys in suburban schools replied at the same rate as the girls in all types of school.

In urban schools, slightly more than four out of eight students responded and in the suburban schools the average was almost six out of eight. The return from predominantly white urban schools was a little lower than from the predominantly black urban schools and the predominantly white suburban schools, which were approximately the same. The most obvious variation was regional. Slightly over four students per school responded in the East and slightly over five per school in the South, with only a little over three per school in the Midwest and West. The two largest cities had lower return rates than the others in their regions.

Some of the variation may have been due to differences in timing. Delay in receiving lists of names for this first round of questions caused some letters to be received after the end of the school year. Now that the lists have been set up it is assumed that timing will be better controlled, with a shorter span between sending out questions and completing a report.

Since some of the schools designated as predominantly Negro had a majority of white students, the proportion of Negro correspondents is smaller than expected. However, no systematic differences were detected in responses to the present questions, except for the more frequent mention of race problems by black students.

The Youth Reporters are asked to tell whether there is much discussion among their fellow students about the subject under inquiry, and what views they hear about it. They are free to give their own personal views or not, as they prefer. They are also free either to interview their peers or to tell what they already know about relevant opinions. Often they give both their own views and those of other teenagers, pointing up areas of agreement and disagreement, and telling what kind of teenager is likely to hold the various views reported.

Some limitations and advantages

Experience has shown that using panel members in this way--as informants rather than as respondents--has a number of advantages, providing the analysis takes the method into account. However, it means that the panel must be regarded as "coverage" rather than as a statistical sample. Results provide an opinion-attitude profile, indicating strong preponderance or fairly equal division of opinions rather than precise proportions on any point.

Judging from their response to the first round of questions, our correspondents, on the whole, are ready and often eager to engage in full and free discussion of subjects that interest them. Nevertheless,

although the 63 percent response rate is remarkably high for a mail inquiry, the 37 percent obviously involves selective factors. Just what they are may become more clear by comparative analysis of non-response throughout successive mailings. For the present it can be assumed that, to a considerable extent, the more interested and articulate students are the ones most likely to respond. At the same time, a number of the responses received suggest by their brevity, penmanship, and spelling, that we are not tapping only the more intellectual and studious individuals. What we have may not be representative of a cross-section of all high school students, but probably does reflect with considerable accuracy the more articulate and effective opinions of those who will constitute tomorrow's college population.

In any kind of interviewing, the question of frankness is always open. The responses give no perceptible indications of inhibition or slanting. At the same time, any interview situation (including the psychoanalyst's couch) is subject to defensiveness, "courtesy bias," "discourtesy bias," and inability of the respondent to know the "true" answer to some questions. Our strong impression is: (1) that the answers of our correspondents are probably at least as frank as face-to-face interviews would be; (2) that they are nevertheless subject to the limitations inherent in most interview material; (3) that the probable magnitude of inevitable distortions is not large enough to invalidate the opinion profiles reported here. This impression derives in part from the nature of the responses. It derives partly from previous experience with analogous studies and comparison of their findings with those of relevant polls and surveys. Such comparison has demonstrated the value of this kind of interview-by-mail as compared with yes-or-no answers to highly structured questionnaires, for exploring opinion patterns and currents. Among the aspects it can help to illuminate are: salience of the issue and of related points; level of information (areas of confusion or misunderstanding); the nature of opinions and attitudes (reasons explicit or implicit, intensity of feeling, and doubts, qualifications, or contradictions); stereotypes, current and emerging.